

# France Wants Major Powers to Make 'Proposals' to Syrian Warring Parties

PARIS - France wants major powers involved in the Syrian crisis to join a contact group that would make proposals to warring parties, in an effort to break a deadlock in political negotiations, the French foreign minister said.

Emmanuel Macron's election victory has given Paris a chance to re-examine its policy on Syria. The change being proposed is to drop demands that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad step down as a pre-condition for talks, although French officials still insist he cannot be the long-term future for Syria. France now appears to be aligning its foreign policy with the U.S. priorities of fighting terrorism and seek-



ing better ties with Russia, a move that it calculates could give it a role as a go-between between the two powers, especially on Syria. "This initiative presumes that we don't set a pre-condition to the talks that Bashar al-Assad must leave," Jean-Yves Le Drian told CNews in an interview carried Wednesday on its website. That should encourage Russia to enter the process, he said. Le Drian gave no details on what new proposals might be offered, a potential format for the contact group or how it would affect existing peace efforts under the auspices of the United Nations, which have limped on for several years with no visible progress. (Reuters)

## Senior U.S., Russian Diplomats Hold 'Tough' Talks: U.S. State Department

WASHINGTON - The U.S. State Department said on Tuesday that senior U.S. and Russian diplomats had held "tough" talks here on areas of mutual concern.

"Following the recent meeting between President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Hamburg, Germany, and multiple bilateral senior-level engagements, Under Secretary Thomas A. Shannon Jr. met his Russian counterpart Sergei Ryabkov Monday to continue

discussing areas of mutual concern," a State Department statement said. According to the statement, the discussion was "tough, forthright, and deliberate, reflecting both parties' commitment to a resolution."

"The United States and Russia seek a long-term solution that would address areas of bilateral concern that have strained the relationship. The talks reflected a spirit of goodwill, but it is clear that more work needs to be done," the statement



added. "The Russian side stressed that if Washington does not remove this and other irritants, including continued obstacles to the work of our diplomatic institutions, we reserve the right to take retaliatory measures based on the principle of reciprocity," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. (Xinhua)

## Chinese Vice Premier Upbeat about China-U.S. Economic Cooperation

WASHINGTON - Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang said on Tuesday that economic cooperation between China and the United States holds out a promising future thanks to China's long-term economic development trend and market potential.

"Cooperation is the only right choice for our two countries. The giant ship of China-U.S. economic and trade relations is sailing on the right course," Wang said at a China-U.S. business luncheon ahead of the first China-U.S. Comprehensive Economic Dialogue, which is slated for Wednesday. China has been pushing forward economic restructuring and adhering to reform and opening-up in its economic development, and these efforts have yielded tremendous progress over the past decades, said Wang.

The contribution of China's consumption to economic growth jumped to 77 percent in the first quarter of this year, up from 47 percent in 2013, he noted. (Xinhua)

## Berlin Summons Turkish Envoy over Detention of Activist

BERLIN - Berlin on Wednesday summoned Turkey's ambassador over the detention of a German human rights activist and issued a fresh warning about the NATO partner's respect for the rule of law.

"The Turkish government needs to immediately and directly hear the German government's outrage and incomprehension as well as its crystal-clear expectations in the case of Peter Steudtner, and this time without diplomatic niceties," foreign min-

istry spokesman Martin Schaefer said. He said the envoy was told "in no uncertain terms" that the detention of Steudtner and five other activists including Amnesty International's Turkey director was "incomprehensible and also unacceptable."

Berlin demanded Steudtner's "immediate release" as well as consular access.

"The Turkish government representative said he would deliver this message immediately" to Ankara. (AFP)

## White House Confirms Trump, Putin Held Second Conversation during G20 Summit

WASHINGTON - The White House confirmed on Tuesday that U.S. President Donald Trump had a second, previously undisclosed conversation with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin during the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany.

"There was a couples-only social dinner at the G20," U.S. National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton told ABC news. "Toward the end, the president spoke to Putin at the dinner." Anton did not mention the length of the conver-

sation, but multiple U.S. media, including the New York Times and CNN, on Tuesday cited a senior White House official as saying that the conversation lasted for nearly an hour.

In a series of tweets on Tuesday night, Trump blasted the news reports of his second conversation with Putin as "sick."

"Fake news story of secret dinner with Putin is



'sick.' All G20 leaders, and spouses, were invited by the Chancellor of Germany. Press knew!" Trump wrote. Trump and Putin met face-to-face for the first time on July 7 on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany. (Xinhua)

## UK's May Seeks to Ease Brexit Fears at new Business Council

LONDON - Prime Minister Theresa May will chair a discussion on Brexit and the economy at the first meeting of a new business council on Thursday, a bid to rebuild bridges with companies concerned over Britain's departure from the European Union. After losing the governing Conservatives' parliamentary majority at an ill-judged election last month, May has stepped up efforts to engage with business after some firms criticized her government for failing to address their worries over Brexit.

Many companies have urged the government to push the European Union to agree a clear and lengthy transitional arrangement after Britain leaves the bloc in 2019 to help them make investment decisions. (Reuters)

## Turkey PM Tweaks Cabinet, Keeps Economic Team Largely in Place

ANKARA - Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim kept the government's economic team largely in place during a limited cabinet reshuffle on Wednesday, notably retaining economist Mehmet Simsek as a deputy premier.

Former justice minister Bekir Bozdog, who has overseen the sweeping crackdown that followed last year's failed coup, was made a deputy prime minister. "Simsek remaining as the one and only deputy PM in charge of the economy is positive, since it hints that sound policies and structural reforms might continue to be on the agenda," said Ozgur Altug of BGC Partners in a note to clients. (Reuters)

## Turkey to Launch Military Operation against Kurds in Northern Syria

ANKARA - Turkey is mulling prospect of launching an offensive to combat the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria's Afrin, while the United States and Russia obstruct such an operation.

Turkish army has reinforced its positions at the border since last week. Its artillery fire also adds credence to predictions that war is around the corner.

Turkey considers the presence of the YPG



militia as a threat to its national security because the group has links with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) listed on many countries' terrorist organizations list.

Afrin is a town located

in northern Syrian city of Aleppo and belongs to a de facto autonomous region controlled by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), also a terrorist group according to Ankara. (Xinhua)

## EU Warns Poland to Suspend Court Reforms or Risk Sanctions

BRUSSELS - The European Union on Wednesday warned Poland's right-wing government to put on hold controversial reforms to the country's courts or risk unprecedented sanctions. In a worsening 18-month standoff between Warsaw and Brussels, the European Commission said Poland's draft reforms could have a "very significant negative impact on the independence" of the courts.

"We are very close to triggering article seven," Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans told a press conference in Brussels, following a high-level

meeting on the issue. If article seven of the EU treaty is activated - and the matter could be discussed as early as next week - Poland could see its voting rights suspended in the council of ministers, the EU's highest decision-making body.

But it was not immediately clear whether the commission could muster the support required from the other 27 member countries, particularly from Poland's ally Hungary. Timmermans said the stakes were high as "these laws considerably increase the systemic threats to the rule of law in Poland." (AFP)

## Russian Lawyer 'Ready' to Meet US Congress over Trump Jr Meeting

MOSCOW - The Russian lawyer at the heart of the scandal over a meeting with President Donald Trump's eldest son claimed Wednesday she is ready to testify to the US Congress.

Lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya attended a meeting with Donald Trump Jr during the election campaign in June 2016 at which it appears he expected to get incriminating information from the Russian government on his father's rival Hillary Clinton.

Trump Jr had been told by email that a "Russian government attorney" would provide damaging details. Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort and son-in-law Jared Kushner also attended.

Veselnitskaya has rejected claims that she was working on behalf of the Russian government, while Trump Jr insists that no sensitive information was passed on. In an interview with the Kremlin-controlled RT television channel, Veselnitskaya said she was "ready" to speak to the US Congress about the meeting "if my security can be assured".

The firestorm around the meeting is the latest chapter in the scandal over possible ties between the Trump campaign and Moscow. US intelligence agencies have accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of approving a hacking and influence campaign to sway the November 2016 vote, allegations rejected by the Kremlin. Trump's administration is currently under investigation by both Congress and the FBI over any possible collusion. (AFP)

## Neighbor News

### Chinese President Calls for 'Every Possible Effort' to Solve Grievances of Petitioners

BEIJING - Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged officials to make "every possible effort" to solve public grievances.

He said officials must treat the handling of public petitions as important work to keeping abreast of public events, pooling people's wisdom, protecting the public interest and improving social solidarity.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a written instruction conveyed to the eighth national conference on petition work, which was held in Beijing Tuesday to Wednesday.

He urged Party committees, government agencies and officials to handle people's legiti-

mate appeals lawfully, in timely fashion and in the local areas, address the root causes of issues, and build a stronger grassroots system, Xi said.

The construction of the legal institutions and related system for addressing public petitions should be improved, Xi said, calling for efforts to make petition work more forward-looking, systematic and targeted.

Speaking highly of petition work in recent years, the president said those handling petitions have helped solve large numbers of problems concerning the immediate interests of the people and played an important role in safeguarding the country's reform, development and stability. (Xinhua)

### President Mamnoon Calls for Missionary Zeal in Public Service

LAHORE - President Mamnoon Hussain Wednesday said civil servants must serve the public with missionary zeal in line with the exemplary sense of duty, compassion and extraordinary spirit of their predecessors.

Addressing the participants of the 10th National Management Course (NMC) here at the National School of Public Policy (NSPP), he lauded the pioneer civil servants who worked day and night despite lack of resources and means for the progress and development of the country soon after the creation of Pakistan.

He said civil servants must adopt the golden principles of kindness, sympathetic redressal of people's complaints to

win the confidence of the masses. Mamnoon Hussain said the bureaucracy, in an Islamic welfare state, must emulate the spirit of public service as per the golden principles of Islam.

He said only those nations achieved progress in the world whose individuals and the responsible remained active in every challenge of life.

He said missionary zeal and passion were required in every step of a nation's life while the absence of these traits caused downfall of nations.

He urged upon the civil servants to keep alive the spirit of public service in their hearts so that the grievance of masses could be resolved and national development could be achieved. (APP)

### Iran Vows 'Proper Response' to New U.S. Sanctions over Missile Program

TEHRAN - Iran on Wednesday vowed to "duly respond" to new U.S. sanctions while pledging to remain committed to the international deal on its nuclear program. Iran will reciprocate the recent U.S. sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities under the excuse of Iran's missile program, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said. "The Americans will never succeed in their new plots against the Islamic republic," he added. The U.S. is unhappy about the atmosphere following the nuclear deal which has resulted in the growing relations between Iran and the Europeans as well as the Asians, the president noted.

"Iran will never withdraw from its international obligations including the nuclear deal," he said. "However, the U.S. sanctions under different pretexts contradict both the text and the spirit of the nuclear deal." (Xinhua)

### EU's Mogherini, Uzbek Discuss Reforms in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - EU - Uzbekistan High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini met the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, on July 18, the EU Delegation said in press release.

The meeting, which took place the day after the 13th Cooperation Council between the European Union and Uzbekistan, was an opportunity for both sides to assess the positive trend of bilateral relations, as well as to discuss regional and in-

ternational matters.

The High Representative and the Foreign Minister discussed the ongoing reform efforts in Uzbekistan that has recently taken a number of encouraging steps to strengthen its engagement with the international partners as well as to strengthen ties with non-governmental organisations and civil society. The High Representative/Vice President stressed the importance of furthering such relationships and the reform efforts. (AKI)